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PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1998-1999

First report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions*

PART VII. PUBLIC INFORMATION

Section 26. Public information

VII.1. The regular budget estimates for part VII, which covers only section 26, Public information, amount to $140,327,600 for the biennium 1998-1999. The estimates reflect a net negative resource growth of $2,497,800, or 1.8 per cent, compared with the 1996-1997 appropriations, and provide for the following changes in the staffing requirements: the abolition of 28 Professional posts, 24 General Service posts and 29 posts under other categories, and the redeployment of one P-4 post to section 8 of the regular budget. The proposed resources also reflect, as can be seen from table 26.2 of the proposed programme budget, reductions of $9,900 for travel, $287,000 for general operating expenses, $83,500 for hospitality, $261,500 for supplies and materials and $40,000 for grants and contributions, while increases are proposed under other staff costs ($469,500), contractual services ($736,800) and furniture and equipment ($659,900).

VII.2. As shown in table 26.1, extrabudgetary resources are estimated at $6,345,800, which reflects an increase over $5,747,600 estimated for 1996-1997. The Advisory Committee notes from the table that no estimates are given in

* The present document contains part VII of chapter II of the first report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999. Chapter I has been issued as Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-second Session, Supplement No. 7 (A/52/7). The complete first report will be issued as Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-second Session, Supplement No. 7 (A/52/7/Rev.1).

respect of extrabudgetary resources to be made available for services in support of extrabudgetary substantive activities; those had been estimated at $6.3 million for 1998-1999.

VII.3. The Advisory Committee points out that the amounts of $140,327,600 requested under the regular budget and $6,345,800 estimated under extrabudgetary resources do not represent the total resources allocated to public information activities of the entire Organization. The Committee was informed, upon inquiry, that, in addition, regular budget resources estimated at $6,008,100 have been requested for public information activities under other sections of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999, as follows:

	Section	Number of posts		Total costs (Thousands of United States dollars)
		Professional	General Service	
7.	Policy coordination and sustainable development	3	3	1 048.7
8.	Africa: New Agenda for Development	3	-	1 422.1
17.	Economic and social development in Asia and the Pacific	4	14	2 374.3
19	Economic and social development in Latin America and the Caribbean	1	3	1 003.8
20.	Economic and social development in Western Asia	-	2	159.2
	Total	11	22	6 008.1

VII.4. The Advisory Committee points out, in this connection, that substantive departments and offices of the Secretariat also perform public information activities, the cost of which cannot be easily identified. Such activities take the form of preparing for and conducting exhibitions, special events, seminars and workshops and issuing various public information materials, such as booklets, journals, magazines and leaflets, and the presentation of websites and pages on the Internet.

VII.5. The Advisory Committee is of the view that the effectiveness of the Secretariat in public information could be considerably greater if the Department of Public Information were assigned additional coordination responsibilities. The Committee recommends, therefore, that the Secretary-General conduct a review of ways in which the public information requirements of the various departments could be coordinated under the umbrella of the Department of Public Information, including the redeployment to it, when economically feasible, of resources related to public information activities that are currently budgeted under other budget sections. The Committee recommends that this issue be examined by the Secretary-General in the context of implementation of such recommendations of the Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities as may be approved (see para. VII.7 below).

VII.6. In the course of its review, the Advisory Committee took note of efficiency projects being implemented by the Department of Public Information, as reflected in document A/51/873. One of the two efficiency projects resulting in savings ($600,000) identified in the report relates to the continued integration of United Nations information centres with UNDP field offices. Upon inquiry, the Committee was informed that the estimated savings and efficiency gains resulted from the use of information technologies, whereby about 20 United Nations information centres, including 9 that are integrated and/or headed by a UNDP resident representative, currently benefit from sharing UNDP communications facilities. Such cooperation includes the provision of e-mail or access to the Internet by means of a UNDP link. Some information centres also share local area network (LAN) environments with UNDP and receive LAN maintenance services provided by UNDP.

VII.7. The Advisory Committee was also cognizant of the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Renewing the United Nations: a programme for reform" (A/51/950). As indicated in paragraphs 251 and 252 of the report, the Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities was set up by the Secretary-General pursuant to his report of 17 March 1997 (A/51/829). The Task Force has submitted its report to the Secretary-General. The Committee was informed that the Secretary-General was currently reviewing the conclusions and recommendations of the Task Force and would submit his report on the issue for consideration by the General Assembly at its fifty-second session.

Report of the Secretary-General on United Nations reform: measures and proposals (A/52/303)

The above report was issued subsequent to the Advisory Committee's consideration of its draft report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999.

As shown in paragraphs 26.2 and 26.4 of that report, the financial consequences of the Secretary-General's actions and recommendations relating to section 26 would be a reclassification of 1 Assistant Secretary-General post to the Under-Secretary-General level and an abolition of 62 posts (1 P-4, 10 General Service and 51 local level). This would entail a reduction of $1,318,600, from $140,327,600 to $139,009,000.

At the time of the Advisory Committee's consideration of its draft report, a decision still had not been reached on how the Secretary-General's reform proposals would be dealt with in the General Assembly. The Committee will therefore revert to consideration of document A/52/303 in due course.